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Letter dated 15 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As you may recall, the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe, in conjunction with the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat convened an African ministerial retreat in response to a request by African ministers to the Chairman of the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Francis Nhema of Zimbabwe. The retreat was held on 10 and 11 May 2008 at Glen Cove, New York, and produced a statement through which African ministers responsible for sustainable development in their various capacities set out the continent's priorities for the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in particular how to effectively address the emerging food crisis, and how to expedite the implementation of Africa's sustainable development goals, as set out in chapter VIII of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

The statement emanating from the ministerial retreat contains a clear vision for Africa's sustainable development and recommendations on how to realize that vision (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could arrange to have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council for the seventeenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

(*Signed*) Boniface G. **Chidyausiku**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 15 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement of African Ministers emanating from the ministerial retreat

Africa is proud of its rich human, natural and cultural resources. Our vision is to realize sustainable development through economic development, social development and environmental protection. This calls for stronger political will on the part of African Governments and a strong commitment to regional cooperation across the length and breadth of the continent.

Africa has made significant progress in recent decades in many areas of sustainable development, but the continent faces continuing as well as new challenges. Progress has been uneven across countries and across social and economic spheres. We all stand to learn from the experiences of the more successful countries among us. All of us have some valuable lessons to offer each other and the rest of the world in specific areas of sustainable development.

We commit to continue projecting a positive African image within Africa and at the international level, and we call on the international community to follow our lead.

We present here a clear vision for our continent's and our countries' sustainable development. We affirm our strong political commitment to realizing this vision, first and foremost with our own collective resolve, resources and ingenuity, but also in close cooperation with our development partners.

We reaffirm the Lagos Plan of Action, the Abuja Treaty, the outcome of the regional implementation meeting for the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in Addis Ababa and the Sirte Declaration on the Challenges of Implementing Integrated and Sustainable Development on Water and Agriculture in Africa. It is our firm hope and expectation that this vision will advance implementation of commitments on Africa contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

We reaffirm our commitment to poverty eradication in the context of the Second United Nations Decade for Poverty Eradication (2008-2017).

We commit to continue pursuing regional integration through trade, infrastructure development and cultural exchanges, and urge the international community to support the strengthening of subregional and regional institutions.

We call upon the international community to support our efforts to implement the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

We are deeply concerned by the current world food crisis and the threat it poses to food security and poverty eradication.

We commit ourselves to accelerate progress towards the Maputo Declaration target of raising the share of national budgets devoted to agriculture and rural development to at least 10 per cent.

We appeal for international support for the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme under the African Union.

We urge the international financial institutions to increase significantly their investment in agriculture and rural development in Africa in order to ensure food security, increase incomes and eradicate poverty.

We further call upon the international community to promote financial and technical support for the implementation of the national action plans to combat desertification, to mitigate the effects of drought and to adapt to climate change in Africa.

We are committed to achieving meaningful integration into the global economy.

We emphasize the need for policy space that promotes ownership of country-led development strategies and programmes.

We urge the international community to meet its commitments to Africa, inter alia, in trade, official development assistance, debt relief, technology transfer and capacity-building, and to assist in meeting the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

We call for the further strengthening of South-South cooperation, both within and beyond Africa, but emphasize that South-South cooperation should not be seen as a substitute for North-South cooperation.

We welcome the Secretary-General's and General Assembly's proposed High-level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs to be held on 22 September 2008, the High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals to be held on 25 September 2008, and the Follow-Up International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008.

Our vision includes actions to:

- Set, as appropriate, national and regional targets to mobilize all stakeholders and ensure the accountability of Governments to achieve sustainable development.
- Launch a "Buy African" initiative, to be coordinated by the African Union, which would promote a diverse range of African products in both regional and international markets. Elements of the initiative could include lowering barriers to intra-regional trade and coordinated and visible marketing of Africa-made goods in international markets.
- Encourage industrial development through value addition to raw materials, including agricultural commodities.
- Make targeted interventions to support the rural poor, including through support to small-scale farmers to access agricultural inputs.
- Mobilize financial and other support to develop and strengthen health and education systems.
- Promote the empowerment of women, including in the socio-economic domain, and support women's full participation in decision-making on agriculture, rural development and resource management.

- Mobilize resources for national and regional infrastructure projects, including road networks, other transport, irrigation, energy supply and information and communications technology, with the support of the international community.
- Enhance investment in the diversification of African rural economies, including credit facilities for small entrepreneurs and farmers, such as the creation of a special fund for smallholder agriculture and expanded microcredit from commercial banks.
- Develop crop and weather insurance at the national and local levels to help farmers, Governments and other actors to manage risk.
- Improve data collection and statistics related to agriculture, in particular agricultural censuses, with greater support from the international community.
- Develop a coherent research and development strategy and strengthened early-warning capacity on the continent to enhance adaptation to climate change.
- Design improved education and management training curricula for promoting entrepreneurship and strengthening capacities for technology absorption, adaptation and innovation.
- Strengthen cooperation among local authorities across the continent to address common sustainable development challenges.
- Promote the creation of decent employment opportunities and the legal empowerment of the poor in the informal sector.
- Strengthen instruments and institutions for natural resource management, including the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.
- Work towards a unified African position in international and bilateral trade negotiations. Towards this end, Africa needs to strengthen the capacity of its own institutions.